

**Original citation:**

Francis, Leslie J., Woolever, Cynthia, Bruce, Deborah and Village, Andrew (2015) Testing the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological health : drawing on the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. In: Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion. Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 26. The Netherlands: Brill Online, pp. 237-249. ISBN 9789004299436

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[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004299436\\_016](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004299436_016)

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Testing the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological health:

Drawing on the U.S. Congregational Life Survey

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### **Abstract**

This study draws on data provided by 622 clergy (who completed the Leader Survey within the U.S. Congregational Life Survey) to examine the balanced affect model of work-related psychological health. These data generated a six-item measure of positive affect (Satisfaction in Ministerial Life Index, or SIMLI), generated a six-item measure of negative affect (Emotional Exhaustion in Ministerial Life Index, or EEMLI), and identified an independent indicator of burnout (the Likelihood of Leaving Ministry Index, or LOLMI). Crucially for supporting the construct validity of the notion of balanced affect, the data demonstrated a significant interaction effect between SIMLI and EEMLI scores on the independent measure of burnout LOLMI, showing that the mitigating effects of positive affect on burnout increased with increasing levels of negative affect.

*Keywords:* Burnout, balanced affect, satisfaction in ministry, emotional exhaustion, clergy

### **Introduction**

Poor work-related psychological health or professional burnout is a matter of theoretical and practical concern across many of the caring professions, including the clergy. One established model for assessing both the levels and correlates of poor work-related psychological health among the caring professions has been operationalised through the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1996). This model conceptualizes and assesses professional burnout as comprising three components, styled emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (in its original or modified form) has been employed in a series of studies among clergy, including work reported by Warner and Carter (1984), Strümpfer and Bands (1996), Rodgeron and Piedmont (1998), Stanton-Rich and Iso-Ahola (1998), Virginia (1998), Francis and Rutledge (2000), Evers and Tomic (2003), Golden, Piedmont, Ciarrocchi, and Rodgeron (2004), Francis, Loudon, and Rutledge (2004), Francis and Turton (2004a, 2004b), Randall (2004, 2007), Hills, Francis, and Rutledge (2004), Raj and Dean (2005), Rutledge (2006), Miner (2007a, 2007b), Doolittle (2007), Francis, Turton, and Loudon (2007), Turton and Francis (2007), Chandler (2009), Joseph, Corveleyn, Luyten, and de Witte (2010), Buys and Rothmann (2010), Parker and Martin (2011), and Joseph, Luyten, Corveleyn, and de Witte (2011).

An alternative model of clergy burnout, proposed by Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005) challenged Maslach's three component sequential model of burnout in favour of a two component balanced affect model, drawing on Bradburn's (1969) classic notion of 'balanced affect', according to which positive affect and negative affect are not opposite ends of a single continuum, but two separate continua. According to this model it is totally reasonable for individual clergy to experience at one and the same time high levels of positive affect and high levels of negative affect. According to this model of balanced affect,

warning signs of poor work-related psychological health occur when *high* levels of negative affect coincide with *low* levels of positive affect. In terms of the work-related experiences of clergy, Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005) translated negative affect into emotional exhaustion and positive affect into ministry satisfaction. These two work-related constructs were then operationalised by separate 11-item scales: Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM), first reported by Francis, Kaldor, Shevlin, and Lewis (2004), and Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). Together these two scales comprise the Francis Burnout Inventory (FBI). Recent studies employing the Francis Burnout Inventory have been reported by Francis, Wulff and Robbins (2008), Francis, Robbins, Kaldor, and Castle (2009), Robbins and Francis (2010), Brewster, Francis, and Robbins (2011), Francis, Gubb, and Robbins (2012), Robbins, Francis, and Powell (2012), Barnard and Curry (2012), and Randall (2013a, 2013b).

In a study conducted among clergy serving in The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Francis, Village, Robbins, and Wulff (2011), set out to test the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological health. The strategy adopted by this study examined the incremental impact on independent measures of burnout of the interaction term created by the product of the two measures of negative affect and positive affect after taking into account the impact of these two factors considered separately. The two independent measures of burnout employed in this study were self-perceived physical health and self-perceived burnout. Self-perceived physical health was assessed by the question: ‘How would you rate your overall health at the present time?’ with the following four response options: excellent, good, fair, and poor. Self-perceived burnout was assessed by the question: ‘To what extent do you think you are suffering from burnout in your current call?’ with the following four response options: to a great extent, to some extent, to a small extent, and not at all. Consistent with the theory of balanced affect, the data demonstrated that the mitigating effects of

positive affect on burnout increased with increasing levels of negative affect. The study reported by Francis, Village, Robbins, and Wulff (2011) tested the theory of balanced affect by employing the two instruments proposed by Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005): the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) as the measure of negative affect and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS) as the measure of positive affect. The way in which the model of balanced affect has been tested, therefore, can be construed as either testing the general model or as testing the performance of the specific instruments employed. Against this background the primary aim of the present study is to test the general model of balanced affect by designing alternative measures of positive affect and negative affect and to test these measures against an independent index of burnout. The opportunity to do this is provided by the Leader Survey included within a second wave of the US Congregational Life Survey conducted in 2008. This primary aim leads to the specification of the following research questions:

1. to identify items within the Leader Survey to create a scale of positive affect, forming a Satisfaction in Ministerial Life Index (SIMLI);
2. to identify items within the Leader Survey to create a scale of negative affect, forming an Emotional Exhaustion in Ministerial Life Index (EEMLI);
3. to identify an independent indicator of burnout within the Leader Survey;
4. to employ these independent measures to test the validity of the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological health.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

In 2008, a second wave of the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, based on a national random sample of all American congregations, was conducted to replicate the 2001 study. The second national random sample (Wave 2) of congregations was identified and recruited

by Harris Interactive. Of the 1,741 congregations nominated and contacted in Wave 2, a total of 692 Leader Surveys were completed (39%).

An eight-page Leader Survey to be completed by the principal leader was included in the package sent out to churches participating in Wave 2. The package also included a separate business-reply envelope for leaders to mail back the survey to maintain their confidentiality. Principal leaders could also complete the survey online. In addition, Harris Interactive made several attempts by mail and by telephone to contact the principal leader in each nominated congregation.

### **Instrument**

The Leader Survey within the U.S. Congregational Life Survey comprised 100 questions, many of which contained multiple items. The themes explored by these questions included the pastors' demographic profile, current ministry positions and tasks, job satisfaction, sources of support and stress, compensation, theological education and beliefs, and career history since ordination or graduation.

### **Participants**

The current analyses are based on the responses of 622 participants who had complete data for the variables used in this analysis. Of these, 28% were Roman Catholic, 43% belonged to mainline Protestant denominations, and 27% belonged to conservative Protestant denominations. The majority (90%) were men and 73% were aged fifty or more. Around 9% had been in ministry less than 10 years, 21% between 10 and 19 years, 32% between 20 and 29 years, and 37% for 30 years or more.

### **Variables**

*Positive affect* was assessed by six items that cohered to form the Satisfaction in Ministerial Life Index (SIMLI). The first three items invited participants to rate their current level of satisfaction with relationships with lay leaders in this church, with their work in

ministry, and with their overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader in this particular congregation, on a four-point scale: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. Item four, 'I have accomplished many worthwhile things in my ministry here', was rated on a five-point scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral or unsure, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. Item five, 'How much of the time during the past four weeks have you been happy?' was rated on a five-point scale: all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, a little of the time, and none of the time. Item six, 'How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?' was rated on a seven-point scale, from extremely delighted, through mixed feelings, to extremely terrible. High scores on this index indicated a high level of positive affect.

*Negative affect* was assessed by six items that cohered to form the Emotional Exhaustion in Ministerial Life Index (EEMLI). The first five items were all rated on a five-point scale (strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral or unsure, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree): I feel drained in fulfilling my functions in this congregation; I am less patient with people in this congregation than I used to be; I feel negative or cynical about the people whom I work; I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks that are important to me; and I have enthusiasm for my work (reverse coded). Item six, 'How much of the time during the past few weeks have you felt downhearted or depressed?' was rated on a five-point scale: all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, a little of the time, and none of the time. High scores on this index indicated a high level of negative affect.

*Burnout* was assessed by three items that cohered to form the Likelihood of Leaving Ministry Index (LOLMI). These items invited participants to rate the following three questions on a four-point scale (very often, fairly often, once in a while, and never): During the past year how often have you seriously thought of leaving: your current position to become a pastor elsewhere; pastoral ministry in a congregation to enter another type of



ministry position; leaving pastoral ministry to enter a secular occupation. High scores on this index indicated a high level of burnout.

### **Analysis**

The burnout measure (LOLMI) was regressed against mean-centered scores for SIMLI and EEMLI, with an interaction term included in the model to test for possibility of balanced affect.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Research question 1**

The first research question was to identify items within the Leader Survey to create a scale of positive affect, forming a Satisfaction in Ministerial Life Index (SIMLI). Table 1 presents the end result of a series of correlational analyses that identified six items, leading to an internal consistency reliability (alpha) coefficient of .78, well in excess of the threshold of acceptability of .65 proposed by DeVellis (2003). The correlations between each individual item and the sum of the other five items ranged between .42 and .64, indicating that each item contributed well to the overall performance of the instrument.

- insert table 1 about here -

The possible responses categories offered in the questionnaire varied according to the nature of the item, but the overall results demonstrated a high level of positive affect among U.S. clergy. Thus, 90% strongly agree or somewhat agree that they have accomplished many worthwhile things in their ministry in their current church; 95% are very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with relationships with lay leaders in their congregation; 94% are very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their work in ministry; 93% are very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader in their particular congregation; 77% are extremely delighted or somewhat delighted with their life as a whole; 81% have been happy all of the time or most of the time during the past four weeks.

**Research question 2**

The second research question was to identify items within the Leader Survey to create a scale of negative affect, forming an Emotional Exhaustion in Ministerial Life Index (EEMLI). Table 2 presents the end result of a series of correlational analyses that identified six items, leading to an internal consistency reliability (alpha) coefficient of .77, well in excess of the threshold of acceptability of .65 proposed by DeVellis (2003). The correlation between each individual item and the sum of the other five items ranged between .47 and .60, indicating that each item contributed well to the overall performance of the instrument.

- insert table 2 about here -

Again, the possible response categories in the questionnaire varied slightly between items, but the data demonstrate some significant indicators of negative affect. Thus 34% strongly agree or somewhat agree that they find themselves frustrated in their attempts to accomplish tasks that are important to them; 32% strongly agree or somewhat agree that they feel drained in fulfilling their functions in their congregation; 17% strongly agree or somewhat agree that they are less patient with people in their congregation than they used to be, and 24% have felt downhearted or depressed at least some of the time during the past four weeks. On the other hand only 7% strongly agree or somewhat agree that they feel negative or cynical about the people with whom they work; and only 5% do not agree that they have enthusiasm for their work.

**Research question 3**

The third research question was to identify within the Leader Survey an independent measure of burnout against which the balanced affect model of work-related psychological health could be tested. Table 3 presents the three items identified to suggest burnout and create the Likelihood of Leaving Ministry Index (LOLMI), which had an acceptable internal consistency reliability (alpha) coefficient of .70. These three items reflect different levels of

discontent with the current experience of pastoral ministry by seeking an exit strategy into a new form of work. The three levels of discontent are expressed in terms of leaving the current position: to become a pastor elsewhere; to enter another type of ministry position; and to enter a secular occupation. The data demonstrate that during the past year 26% had seriously thought at least once in a while of entering a secular occupation; 35% had seriously thought at least once in a while of seeking another type of ministry position outside pastoral ministry; and 48% had seriously thought at least once in a while of becoming a pastor elsewhere.

- insert table 3 about here -

#### **Research question 4**

The fourth research question was to employ the independent measure of burnout to assess the incremental impact of the interaction term between SIMLI and EEMLI as an indicator of the construct validity of the balanced affect model of clergy work-related psychological health. As predicted from previous studies of burnout, the LOLMI was positively correlated with the satisfaction in ministry scale (SIMLI) ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ) and negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion scale (EEMLI) ( $r = -.50, p < .001$ ), while the SIMLI and EEMLI were themselves negatively correlated ( $r = -.63, p < .001$ ). Burnout increased with emotional exhaustion and decreased with satisfaction, and those who were dissatisfied with their ministry were also more likely to be emotionally exhausted. The crucial test for balanced affect was to see if the effect of exhaustion on burnout was less among those who were satisfied with their ministry than among those who were not. The interaction of SIMLI and EEMLI was highly statistically significant when included in a multiple linear regression (Table 4), and this indicated that the effect of exhaustion on burnout was mitigated among those with higher ministry satisfaction, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

- insert table 4 about here -

- insert Figure 1 about here -

### **Conclusion**

This study employed data provided by 622 clergy who completed the Leader Survey within the US Congregational Life Survey in order to explore the work-related psychological health of these clergy through the model of balanced affect proposed by Bradburn (1969) and applied to the field of clergy burnout by Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005). Five main conclusions emerged from these analyses.

First, the notion of positive affect was recovered from the data within the survey and expressed through the development of the six-item Satisfaction in Ministerial Life Index (SIMLI). Overall the responses to these six items profile these clergy as a group of professionals who enjoy a high level of positive affect in connection with their ministry.

Second, the notion of negative affect was also recovered from the data within the survey and expressed through the development of the six-item Emotional Exhaustion in Ministerial Life Index (EEMLI). Overall the responses to these six items profile these clergy as a group of professionals who experience a significant level of negative affect that is held alongside and in tension with the high level of positive affect.

Third, the fact that these clergy were able to display at one and the same time a high level of positive affect and a significant level of negative affect affirms the first principle of balanced affect theory. This principle maintains that positive affect and negative affect are not opposite poles of single continuum but relatively independent psychological constructs whereby the same individual is able to display aspects of both negative affect and positive affect.

Fourth, a regression model that explored the predictive power of SIMLI, EEMLI and the interaction term (SIMLI x EEMLI) for an independent indicator of burnout (likelihood of leaving the current ministry role) affirmed the second principle of balanced affect theory.

This principle maintains that positive affect mitigates the effects of negative affect on work-related psychological health and professional burnout.

Fifth, the earlier study reported by Francis, Village, Robbins and Wulff (2011) confirmed the construct validity of the balanced affect model of work-related psychological health among a sample of 744 clergy serving in The Presbyterian Church (USA), employing the two measures of positive affect and negative affect proposed by Francis, Kaldor, Robbins, and Castle (2005): the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS). The fact that the present study has come to the same conclusion using two very different measures of positive affect (SIMLI) and negative affect (EEMLI) adds further confirmation of the basic theory of the balanced affect approach to clergy work-related psychological health and suggests that the theory is sufficiently robust to be operationalised through a variety of instruments.

#### **Note**

Our colleague Deborah Bruce died while this paper was being prepared. We dedicate it to her memory.

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Table 1

*Satisfaction in Ministerial Life Index (SIMLI)*

	<i>r</i>
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in my ministry here	.42
Satisfaction with relationships with lay leaders in this congregation	.50
Satisfaction with work in ministry	.64
Satisfaction with overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader	.62
Happiness during the past few weeks	.54
Satisfied with life as a whole	.56
alpha	.78

Note:  $r$  = item rest of scale correlation

Table 2

*Emotional Exhaustion in Ministerial Life Index (EEMLI)*

	<i>r</i>
I do not have enthusiasm for my work	.47
I feel drained in fulfilling my functions in the this congregation	.60
I am less patient with people in this congregation than I used to be	.55
I feel negative or cynical about the people with whom I work	.51
I find myself frustrated in my attempts to accomplish tasks that are important to me	.54
Felt downhearted and depressed	.51
alpha	.77

Note: *r* = item rest of scale correlation

Table 3

*Likelihood of Leaving Ministry Index (LOLMI)*

	<i>r</i>	Never %	Once in a while %	Fairly often %	Often %
How often have you seriously thought of leaving for:					
another pastoral job	.48	52	39	6	3
another ministry job	.60	65	28	5	2
a secular job	.47	74	23	2	1
alpha	.70				

Note: *r* = item rest of scale correlation

Table 4

*Multiple linear regression of burnout (LLI) against satisfaction (SIMLI) and emotional exhaustion (EEMLI)*

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>P</i> <
Constant	4.19	0.006		.001
SIMLI	-0.117	0.024	-.218	.001
EEMLI	0.117	0.016	.307	.001
SIMLI*EEMLI	-0.021	0.004	-.210	.001
R <sup>2</sup>			.346	

Note. Independent variables were mean centred.

Figure 1 Interaction of SIMLI and EEMLI scores on self-assessed burnout (LLI). Note: For illustration, EEMLI scores are displayed as quartiles and SIMLI scores were categorized around the median score (20): Solid circles = low satisfaction, open circles = high satisfaction. Error bars are 95% confidence limits.

